Semantic-Image Networks: Mapping and Validating the Multi-Modal Discursive Space of Populist Social Media

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Abstract:

Right-wing radicalism is a political phenomenon rooted in a sense of geographic and symbolic place. In this study, we examine the role of place in radical right politics in social media. Understanding how place and right-wing radicalism intersect in online social media is important substantively and theoretically, yet also challenging methodologically since online communications often involve multiple media. Thus, analyzing texts without images may provide a partial or even biased understanding of social media communications. To address this concern, we introduce an automated method for analyzing both texts and images in social media and apply it to our question about place and the radical right. This method converts image into texts and then uses a combination of topic models with network analysis. Our preliminary results suggest that there is a triangular relationship between security forces, place, and support for the populist right. Finally, we validate our results using human crowdsourcing.